

**Reference number**

██████████

**What is your name?**

██████████████████

**What is your email address?**

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**If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation, please state its name.**

██████████████████

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Yes

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**Clause 1**

**Do you feel Clause 1 goes far enough in formally recognising BSL and ISL as languages of Northern Ireland?**

Yes

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I would answer yes assuming that both BSL and ISL will be included in the legislation. I think we will need to ensure along with the DDA that all of our rights are covered, and personally I feel there should be a stronger emphasis on our heritage and culture.

**Clause 2**

**Do you feel Clause 2 goes far enough in promoting the use of BSL and ISL and developing deaf culture?**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I disagree with clause 2 where it says teaching deaf children and their families will promote sign language. I think language acquisition should fall under the remit of education alongside teachers of the deaf who are with children from very early in

their lives, through to nursery school, then on to primary school and secondary school. Teaching children sign language is part of their educational journey as opposed to promoting sign language. However, as deaf educators and role models we can be a pathway to bring children into our community via community events and clubs. I think what's key for deaf children is that they have exposure to deaf culture and it would be refreshing to see a medical pathway that refers deaf children and their families to deaf mentors and deaf clubs and places where deaf children can find their identity and culture. So in short, I don't think teaching children and their families sign language promotes deaf culture. Deaf children need to be exposed to the deaf community so they understand who they are, so they can develop their sense of deaf identity and deafhood. Teaching sign language falls under the remit of education, while deaf culture is something that needs to be promoted within the deaf community and by the deaf community. When we promote culture, we promote sign language.

**Are there any other approaches (apart from providing for the availability of classes) that could help to meet the objective of the greater use and understanding of BSL and ISL? YES/NO**

Yes

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I think it would be wonderful within the education setting for deaf role models and sign language teachers to go into the classroom and teach sign language and teach other subjects to showcase us as a community and our language. This would give young children exposure to sign language from a young age and teach them another valuable language and skill, and for any deaf children in that setting, they would have a role model and peer who is also deaf. I think it would be excellent to develop a bank of deaf teachers who are able to provide courses in schools, because a lot of deaf people have incredible experience and skills, especially for teaching their own language.

**Clause 3**

**Do you think the duty placed on prescribed organisations to make the information and services accessible to members of the deaf community is sufficient? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I don't think this is sufficient for either the public or private sectors. It's good to see the commitment within the public sector, albeit their commitment is already outstanding compared to other jurisdictions. I would ask about charities, private companies, small companies, and what responsibility they have and what support is given to them to ensure their services are also accessible for those of us who are deaf. I assume there will be funding available for the public sector to become more

accessible, but is there a way for some public money to be available also to these other sectors so they too can become more accessible for the deaf community? As deaf people, we also access charities and the private sector, and having support for that sector is key and should be considered within the bill. I think this would have a knock-on effect on employment, because as deaf people we find it very difficult to gain employment and to feel included in the workplace. Also, we need more Access to Work support, that is so important, especially for those people who are self-employed or trying to run their own businesses. They need the support to be able to communicate in order to run their business well. Access to Work support here is dreadful and needs to be addressed, and I would have thought this was the perfect time to address it.

#### **Clause 4**

**Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I disagree with DFC making these choices. I believe they should work in more collaboration with the likes of the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, and the deaf community. Really, the deaf community should be making these choices because we know what we need. DFC have no idea what it's like to be deaf, they have no empathy to understand our lives, and they have no deaf leadership within the department. Therefore, what we need is for deaf people to lead these huge decisions that concern our lives. When we're talking about public money, there should be much more care taken around the decisions on how to spend it, and the best way to make those decisions is to give the deaf community ownership.

#### **Clause 5**

**Do you support the approach to consultation required in clause 5? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I have to be honest and say that I have lost faith in how the BDA will work on our behalf. [REDACTED] was seconded to DFC to work on the bill [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I also think this process isn't reaching the entire deaf community, and my fear is that within the clause there's an opportunity for one person to consult - and that is not fair or appropriate. We need to have a sign language users' forum or group within the Assembly for the Assembly to come and get neutral, unbiased feedback from people who do not gain money from DFC. This group needs to have representatives from all over Northern Ireland to ensure you're hearing the voices and needs of the entire deaf community.

## **Clause 6**

**Do you support the approach taken in this clause? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I personally feel it should consist of all the deaf organisations including RNID, Adapt NI, Action Deaf Youth, the BDA, Sense, the queer community, and lots of individuals. We have a strong and vibrant queer community who are deaf here, and our needs are very different from others. We have the framework and the BDA seem to be promoting that, but like this suggestion of only having one representative, that is how that was also made. You need the voices of the entire deaf community and voices that are neutral. You need people from all areas of the deaf community to come together because there you'll get diverse views, and there needs to be a way where you get neutral information and neutral feedback.

**Do you feel there is anything else this Clause should include? YES/NO**

Yes

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I can't really respond to this clause because there's so little information, and personally I would like to be able to see the regulations and the guidelines to make an informed decision. Without sight of them, how can we do that? I would like to think that the legislation not only focuses on young people but caters for the entire deaf community, from birth right up to the elderly.

## **Clause 7**

**Do you support the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations detailed in clause 7? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

No, I disagree that DFC should take the lead to create these regulations. For years, many of us have been going to DFC with views and ideas, especially about the framework, but we've been ignored. I would much prefer the Assembly, along with the deaf community, to write these regulations. At the moment, the bill isn't addressing the gaps. We have access to public services, but in some ways processes need to be streamlined. As I said, we need access to the private sector. If we had been listened to, I feel this would have been included. I implore you to listen to the voices of us, the deaf community, who know what it's like to be deaf because we've lived it every day.

**Do you support the approach to consultation detailed in clause 7? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Again, I would like to see the Assembly, along with a sign language user forum, come together for reviewing or creating new regulations, and not solely leave that to DFC. I need to reiterate, there needs to be deaf leadership in all of this. We need to use the deaf organisations and ensure that they are accountable and can prove that they are getting the views of the entire deaf community, and not just those who will financially benefit from the work of DFC.

**Clause 8**

**Do you feel the level of consultation required in clause 8 is sufficient? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I will repeat the need to have proper representation from the deaf community, whether that is a smaller group who are able to take feedback from a wider group, but there needs to be more than just one person or one group. This impacts all ages of deaf people. I think this call for evidence will show you how little of the community understands what is going on around the bill, which is quite sad but a good learning point. We know that very few people will have the information or the means to respond. My question is: who is bridging that gap? Because whoever is supposed to be doing it now isn't. We need this to change and we need the voices of the entire deaf community to reach the Assembly so it can understand our needs.

**Clause 9**

**Do you think evaluating the impact of the Bill in a report every five years is an appropriate length of time? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I disagree with this timeframe and think that for the initial years, a report should be written every two years. We can expect things might take time to settle and embed. Post-enactment, we can assume there will be changes or more input needed. So it's better to give the first couple of years as much focus and attention as possible, so the right changes can be made. Once things settle, that can extend to three years. What I foresee is that as the act starts to push change, gaps in services (e.g., education) will become more obvious. My hope is that larger issues can be addressed as we go. There's no detail of metrics or what the report will include. I would like deaf organisations and professionals to be involved in the process and suggest what needs to be reviewed.

**Clause 10**

**Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I don't agree with DFC leading this work because if DFC lead it, it will be hearing-led. [REDACTED] Deaf people are the experts in this area, but we haven't been given the opportunity to grow in that expertise. I would like to see a completely different approach, because the current one isn't working. I would never like to see us move away from a UK-wide system, because we need the expertise of those elsewhere. [REDACTED] it is very worthwhile to be a part of something much bigger. DFC have set up courses in the past that were run by hearing people with no knowledge of sign language, and this is quite shocking. First of all, to teach a group of deaf people, it's very important to understand the education system that we were all put through. Secondly, how can you teach deaf people to teach sign language if you don't know sign language? I suggest that DFC do not lead this work, and that we keep our strong ties to other organisations in the UK, for example Signature, who have years of experience and expertise and have deaf people leading their organisation.

**Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Once again, I disagree with DFC leading this work and having anything to do with accreditation. As a community, we have campaigned for years alongside NRCPD to put in place systems and requirements whereby interpreters must be registered. Please do not undo this good work by giving DFC this level of authority. The NRCPD is reputable and they have many years of experience. It has taken an incredible amount of collaboration to get to the standard that NRCPD now works to. And even at that, NRCPD is still not perfect, because it is such a difficult procedure and process. I would hate to see us move away from the NRCPD register, and I do not want to see our own separate accreditation process or register. Many of our NI interpreters work in England, Scotland and Wales and gain a lot from working in those environments that they can bring back to Northern Ireland. If our interpreters are registered differently, they will not be seen as credible or able to work in these other areas. I don't think DFC understands the need for high-quality interpreters or how to produce them. The MA at QUB highlights this—it's hearing-led, and the difference that has made is quite noticeable. Personally, it shows again how little DFC understand or respect deaf leadership and the deaf voice.

**Clause 11**

**Do you agree with the definition of the deaf community provided for in the Bill? YES/NO**

No

**Please give details to support your answer. Please outline what people or groups you think should be included or excluded and why.**

I can't answer this yet as I need more time to understand the categories and their implications. There's no real explanation as to why those other categories have been added alongside those of us who are deaf and use sign language. I just need more time to try and understand and think through what it means. I need time to unpack this and look at it from a linguistic and disability viewpoint.

**Clause 12**

**Do you agree with the definition of BSL and ISL provided for in the Bill? YES/NO**

Yes

**Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.**

Yes, I think it's key that the word visual is used, because if something isn't visual, it's not accessible to us. Visual is important, and it's always important to stress that this is a language that uses visual aspects as language. I think it's important

**Clause 13**

**Do you agree with the definition of "everyday reliance" provided in the Bill? YES/NO**

Yes

**Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.**

People use speech every day and that's not perceived as an issue. Likewise, I use sign language every day, whether that's to meet friends, to attend medical appointments, to attend a deaf event, or to communicate with wider society. I need an interpreter, and to interact with written materials, I prefer those materials in sign language. So yes, I rely on BSL every day. Just as everybody relies on language to communicate, I too rely on the language that happens to be BSL.

**Any other comments**

**Is there anything which you expected the Bill to make provision for which has not been included in the Bill? YES/NO**

Yes

### **Please give details to support your answer.**

I have to be honest and say there's a lot I don't know and don't understand about this piece of legislation, as there hasn't been great communication to date. I also see many gaps within the current bill. For example, there's no Access to Work, no mention of the rainbow deaf community, no proper support for deaf education, and no clear plan for a potential deaf hub. There's also no mention of the resources required or the financial implications going forward. No clear sight of regulations or plans to help us understand what this legislation will actually mean for our lives. There has been no effort from DFC to ensure that we understand the bill, its clauses, and the impact. There's no outline of next steps or how we can be involved going forward. Given this consultation remit that DFC is suggesting, I do feel worried about my ability to be involved. Politics is a very hard area to access, and for an already marginalised community like ours, I can't see this enabling us to participate. It might be easy for an outsider to say it looks wonderful, but I see that there's no detail, no regulations or concrete outcomes, and that worries me. As it stands, I don't see this legislation giving us an equal place in society.

### **If you have any other comments in relation to the Bill please tell us here**

I hope my responses are helpful. From my point of view, it's been a difficult exercise to give an opinion on something when there's so little detail. At this point, we need to clarify the clauses and understand them much better before they can be taken further or passed. The committee and the Assembly need to clarify matters not just with DFC but directly with the deaf community. There needs to be a mechanism for gaining feedback directly from the deaf community, not deaf feedback via DFC. I hope deaf people are invited to give oral evidence, as that is key at this point. It's important that you don't assume what deaf people think is a good idea - ask them. Ask how we think society could be more accessible, not just in the public sector but also the private sector. Too many assumptions have been made, and I don't want to see regulations that we know won't help in the long run. For example, at newborn hearing screenings, there is no signposting to any deaf organisations that promote sign language. That experience for parents can be very difficult, and we have the means to make it easier. [REDACTED] young people aged 15 to 28 [REDACTED] still struggling to access education. It's sad that nothing has changed since I was in school. It's time we are listened to. We need to see a huge shift in how deaf young people are educated in Northern Ireland. I would love to be part of a group that advises the committee as needed. We need our deaf professionals working in the mainstream world to come together with ideas. Deaf organisations do good work, but they live in a deaf bubble. You need to hear from those of us who live the real-world experience—those of us working in mainstream settings, providing services, or running businesses as deaf professionals. We have important things to say.